

Environmental News

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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EPA proposes mine site near Creede, CO, for Superfund List

(Denver, Colo. - March 19, 2008) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is proposing the addition of the Nelson Tunnel/Commodore Waste Rock site near Creede, Colo., to the National Priorities List (NPL) of Superfund sites. The draining mine adit and waste rock pile are located about one mile above the town of Creede in Mineral County, Colo. Today's announcement begins a sixty-day period in which citizens may send comments on the proposed listing to EPA.

The site is approximately five acres in size and consists of an abandoned mine site. It includes the Nelson Tunnel, a draining adit that drains directly into West Willow Creek and the Commodore Waste Rock pile that is immediately upslope and surrounds the mouth of the adit. West Willow Creek joins Willow Creek which flows into the Rio Grande River approximately four miles from the site.

The historical mining of silver, lead, and zinc in the Creede mining district resulted in contaminated water discharging into the Willow Creek drainage and mine waste piles accumulating in the watershed. The Nelson Tunnel adit drainage is the largest source of cadmium, lead and zinc in the Willow Creek watershed.

The Commodore Waste Rock pile also contains elevated levels of arsenic, cadmium, lead, and zinc. The drainage constructed around the pile failed in 2005 during a flood which left the Commodore Waste Rock pile highly unstable. The pile lies primarily in West Willow Creek, but during the flood some of the rock was washed downstream into Willow Creek. The potential exists for these piles to contaminate the town of Creede during another flood.

A biological assessment of the Willow creek watershed indicated concentrations for cadmium, lead and zinc that exceed recommended dietary intake benchmarks and aquatic water standards for fish and birds. These analyses identified cleanup of the Nelson Tunnel as a key element to restoring the Willow Creek stream and streamside habitat.

"Because of the complexity and cost of cleaning up the contamination coming from the Nelson Tunnel, adding this site to the National Priorities list is one of the few viable options that will ensure the work gets done," said Gwen Christiansen, Environmental Scientist and Engineer for EPA. "The cleanup will improve water quality while

protecting the rich mining history and historical structures in the area."

Christiansen said the National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties on and around the site.

The NPL is a published list of sites in the United States that are contaminated by hazardous substances and eligible for extensive, long-term cleanup under the Superfund program. Listing on the NPL makes a site eligible to receive federal funds for cleanup while EPA seeks to recover costs from identified responsible parties, if any. Placing a site on the NPL also allows EPA to use Superfund money for cleanup when there are no responsible parties who can pay for the work.

Listing this site on the NPL guarantees the public an opportunity to participate in cleanup decisions. Affected communities are also eligible for technical assistance grants from the EPA to help facilitate understanding technical documents and provide for community involvement at the site. Information that EPA used to document the proposed listing of the site is available at: www.epa.gov/region8/superfund/co/nelsoncommodore

The information may also be obtained at the following locations:

U.S. EPA
Superfund Records Center
1595 Wynkoop Street
Denver, CO 80202-1129

Town Hall
Meeting Room
2223 N. Main Street
Creede, CO 81130

The comment period on this proposed listing is open from March 19 to May 19, 2008. Those interested in commenting on the proposed NPL listing should submit their comments, identified by the FDMS Docket number using one of the following methods:

- www.regulations.gov and follow the online instruction for submitting comments.
- For written comments, provide the original plus one copy to the following address:

Docket Coordinator, Headquarters
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
CERCLA Docket Office (Mail Code - 5305T)
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington D.C. 20460
(202) 566-0276

- Comments may also be e-mailed to: superfund.Docket@epa.gov

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